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**Commission on the Status of Women**
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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"**

## Statement submitted by Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Franciscans International, Grail, International Council of Jewish Women, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, National Council of Women of the United States, Salvation Army, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

We, non-governmental organizations working towards the realization of gender equality, urge the Commission on the Status of Women to address the issue of trafficking in women and girls from rural communities. This widespread practice is a current and growing challenge to the empowerment of rural women.

### Vulnerability of rural women to trafficking

The poverty of women and girls in rural areas makes them vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers. This vulnerability, coupled with the demand for women and girls to be exploited in the sex industry and as a source of cheap labour, makes the abduction, enticement and deception of these women and girls profitable to traffickers. The rural populations in many countries are among the most impoverished, causing growing numbers of rural women and girls to be sold into prostitution or forced labour, within both rural and urban areas.

Rural women and girls are trafficked both internationally and within the borders of their own countries. They are often lured by promises of legitimate and well-compensated work away from their communities and families. Instead, they are sold into the commercial sex industry or exploited in forced labour, where women and girls are often subjected to many forms of gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and harassment.

The effect of globalization on agriculture and small-scale industries, which are the main sources of income in rural economies, has been devastating. Owing to continuing gender inequality, women continue to be discriminated against in employment. Therefore, the disappearance of jobs in local industry and family farms has disproportionately affected women. In addition, girls' education is often neglected in rural areas, negatively affecting their job prospects. The literacy rates for women in the rural areas of many countries are much lower than for women in the urban areas of those countries.

Globalization has also increased the demand for sexual exploitation, with wealthy foreigners joining local buyers seeking commercial sex. Sex tourism is an increasing problem, particularly in developing countries. Motivated by the profitability of selling sex, traffickers transport rural women and girls to tourist areas to meet the demand for prostitution. As the women and girls are separated geographically from friends and family who might be able to help them, and because they lack education and have no access to money, their prospects for escaping a life of sexual exploitation are limited.

### Effects of trafficking on rural women's empowerment

Women who are enticed to migrate often do so as a way out of poverty and possibly to provide financial assistance to their families and communities of origin. Traffickers and pimps exploit women and girls seeking to improve their lives through education, employment, migration or other opportunities. Denied access to school by traffickers, girls fail to develop their economic potential, often perpetuating their exploitation into adulthood. Denied opportunities for decent work by traffickers, women are unable to improve their lives. For women to be able to participate in the development of their communities, trafficking in women and girls must be eliminated.

The negative impact of trafficking on the health and human rights of women and girls around the world is tremendous. Victims often suffer severe health consequences, including physical injuries from beatings, rapes and unwanted sex; psychological trauma; sexually transmitted diseases; and alcohol and drug abuse induced by pimps or by the victims' attempts to self-medicate. Sexual violence, which is suffered by the victims of both sex trafficking and female labour trafficking, is one of the leading factors responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (now part of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) have identified gender inequality as the core cause of the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, citing their inability to exercise control over their bodies and their lives. Women and girls suffering from these severe and long-term health problems are hindered in their ability to participate in the economic development of their communities.

**Recommendations**

We urge policy and action in the following areas:

- Make specific and local recommendations not only about ending particular forms of male violence but also on transforming the systemic social and economic structures, such as patriarchy and other harmful social systems, that unremittingly disadvantage women
- The elimination by Governments of economic and discriminatory factors, such as poverty, systematic violence against women and girls, gender discrimination, harmful traditional practices and other forms of discrimination, such as racism, that render rural women and girls vulnerable to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation
- The examination and reform of economic development policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on rural populations
- The implementation on a national basis in all regions of educational curricula that promote gender equality in relationships through raising awareness of the harms of gender stereotyping, sexual exploitation and the objectification of women and girls
- Ensure equal access to education and the establishment of literacy programmes for rural women and girls
- Adequately fund and support services for the survivors of international and domestic trafficking and prostitution, including exit programmes with financial assistance, education and job training, employment opportunities, housing, health services, legal advocacy, residency permits and language training
- The promotion of effective laws against trafficking, prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation, including provisions criminalizing the demand for trafficking and prostitution based on the principles of gender equality, such as the Nordic Model
- The rejection of governmental policies promoting prostitution, whether through the legalization or the decriminalization of the sex industry

- The rejection of the misleading term "sex work", which minimizes the abuses and exploitation of prostitution and attempts to redefine it as an ordinary job, particularly for impoverished and marginalized women

- The ratification and implementation of the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Governments must adopt and adequately fund programmes aimed at ensuring equal access to education for rural women and girls and ending employment discrimination based upon gender. Adopting short-sighted economic development policies and normalizing industries that are not protective of dignity and human rights prevent societies from achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. Governments must ensure that rural communities are not left impoverished and without opportunities for women as a result of globalization and shifting industrial systems. Governments must also eliminate policies that institutionalize exploitation by legally legitimizing it. The trafficking in rural women and girls into commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour must be eradicated by addressing both the poverty that makes them vulnerable and the demand that drives the industry.